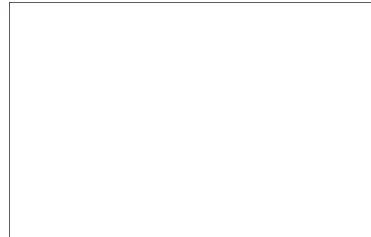




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Afghanistan Situation Report



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26 April 1983

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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

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This document is prepared weekly by the Office of Near East/South Asia and the Office of Soviet Analysis. Questions or comments on the issues raised in the publication should be directed to [redacted]

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MASOOD COMMENTS ON NEGOTIATIONS

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[redacted] a de facto truce with the Soviets had developed early this year after talks for broader agreement in the valley stalled. Masood reportedly needed the truce to allow time to build alliances with other groups in northeastern Afghanistan, rebuild his defenses, and protect civilians in the Panjsher.

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Comment: Insurgents in and around the Panjsher probably will continue to accept Masood's leadership, but a continuing truce eventually will erode his credibility. To maintain his control and silence future questions on his loyalty to the resistance, Masood will have to launch some kind of attack. The Soviets probably will not break the truce but will continue to use their forces in operations, like the recent sweeps near Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City, to destroy any potential Panjsher-like strongholds before Masood or any other leader can establish them.

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FIGHTING INCREASING AROUND QANDAHAR CITY

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The Embassy in Kabul reports that insurgent activities in and around the city increased in mid-March after popular support for the resistance grew in response to intensive government conscription efforts. Regime personnel can move unescorted through some areas of Qandahar during the day, but the highway toward Herat is unsafe for all Soviet and government vehicles. Insurgents apparently have established a stronghold northwest of the city, forcing the government to move its district capital south. On 12 April, 30 insurgents attacked, occupied, and extensively damaged the Indian Consulate, which the guerrillas believe is aiding government intelligence operations.

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Comment: The situation in Qandahar illustrates the unsolved, fundamental counterinsurgency problem confronting Soviet forces in Afghanistan--resurgence of insurgent activity even after extensive multibattalion sweep operations. Repeating the intensive air and ground attacks against Qandahar, used in a similar situation in early 1982, probably would cause the insurgents to withdraw into nearby rugged terrain. Continued alienation of the local citizenry, apparent growth of insurgent manpower and weaponry, and lack of Soviet or Afghan troops to garrison cleared areas permanently probably would permit guerrillas to resume attacks within a short time.

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ANDROPOV DEFENDS AFGHANISTAN POLICY

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Yuri Andropov has reaffirmed Moscow's policy on Afghanistan in his first public comments on the situation since his accession to the post of General Secretary. In answer to a question from the West German magazine Der Spiegel on 19 April, Andropov claimed that Soviet troops had been invited by the Afghan Government then in power. Noting the long common border, Andropov said that "in assisting friends, we at the same time think of ensuring the interests of our security." He said the troops would be withdrawn "as soon as outside interference in the affairs of Afghanistan has been terminated and nonresumption of such interference guaranteed." Andropov said talks under UN auspices "have some prospects" but are difficult because Pakistani officials are "being held by their sleeve by their overseas friends."

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Comment: Andropov's reassertion of unchanged Soviet positions puts his personal stamp on the Brezhnev policy that he had helped shape and then inherited. The reference to Soviet security apparently was intended to emphasize Moscow's determination to consolidate a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan. By blaming Pakistan for difficulties in UN mediation, Andropov indicated that the USSR wants to keep the mediation efforts going while trying to escape blame for lack of progress.

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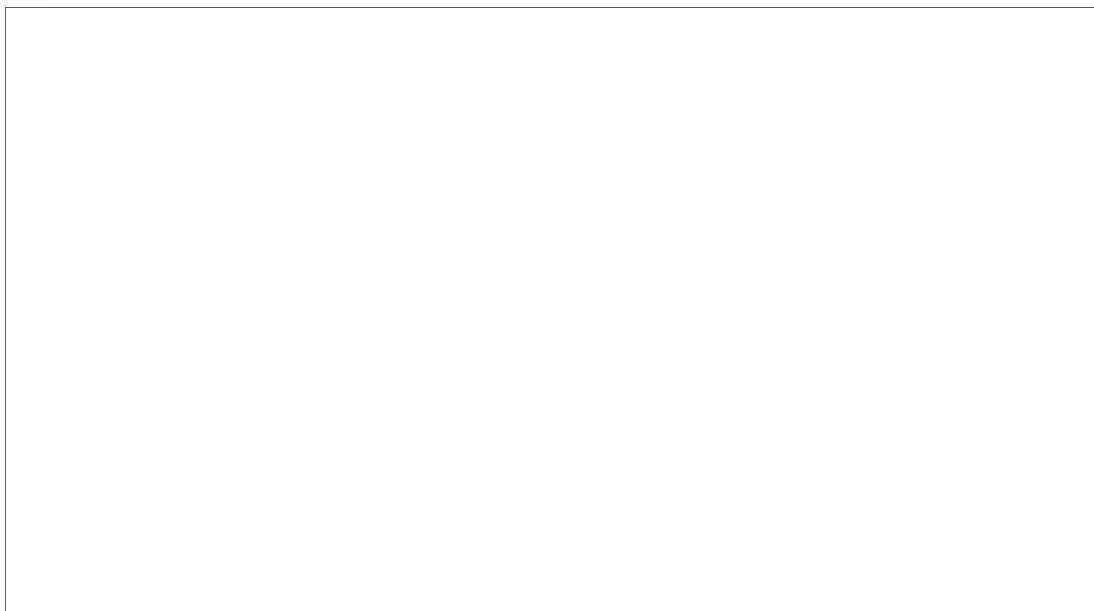
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-- Soviet media reported in late March the death of journalist Aleksander Kaverznev. Kabul Embassy reported rumors that Kaverznev died in Afghanistan after being poisoned or shot, but Moscow Embassy sources indicate Kaverznev died following his return to the USSR, though rumors conflict as to whether his death was from illness or poisoning.

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-- Kabul Embassy reports that the last of its white collar Foreign Service National employees has been notified by KHAD that he will be arrested upon his recovery from an illness, and a contract commissary worker who disappeared on 19 April is now reported in prison.

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